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MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. McGeorge Bundy
Special Assistant to the President
For National Security Affairs

SUBJECT : The Anticipation of Foreign Crises

REFERENCE : NSAM 277

NSC review completed.

1. The anticipation of foreign crises is a fundamental problem, running across the whole range of political, economic, sociological and even military intelligence. It is also an exceptionally intractable one. Furthermore, unlike the specialized problem of providing warning of impending military action, it cannot usefully be attacked by the methodology of "indications intelligence". A nation preparing to go to war normally must do certain things; a pattern of these things may sometimes be detectable. Political crisis, however, arises from the complex interaction of all-too-human beings and political and social dynamics which they do not necessarily understand or control. This is not to say that detection of impending military action is any less difficult, but only that it is different. Examination of the most recent crises with which the US Government has had to deal--Vietnam, Cyprus, Panama, East Africa, Malaysia--shows few patterns or similarities. Specifically, Communist policy cannot be singled out as a unifying element; only in Vietnam is the crisis primarily a result of deliberate Communist action.

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2. CIA believes that the anticipation of crises depends less on simplistic mechanical approaches, "quick fixes", or organizational questions than on the general quality of intelligence produced, and essentially on the caliber of intelligence personnel. Within this framework, and recognizing that no system can guarantee the US Government that it will not occasionally be surprised by foreign developments, there are elements in the present system which can and should be strengthened.

a. Collection: An effective country team, with reporting responsibilities clearly determined and vigorously pursued, is essential if political warning is to be provided.

b. Analysis: In general, present procedures seem adequate. The difficulty is to get and keep the best possible people. Warning is as likely to come from a trained analyst's visceral reaction to a seemingly innocuous bit of information as from a circumstantial field report of high evaluation.

c. Reporting: The most important problem, and one that has never been adequately solved, is that of communications between the intelligence producer and the national policymaker, notwithstanding the number of intelligence publications devoted to this purpose. I am giving this subject fuller treatment in the following paragraphs.

3. Both producer and policymaker are at fault. The intelligence officer may take out cheap insurance by publishing extensive "laundry lists" of potential crises in which genuine warnings are buried, or may coordinate his product until warning is effectively camouflaged by qualifiers and over-formal language, or may lose focus on his audience by treating the dramatic and immediate in one publication and the dull and gradual in another. The senior policymaker may be too reluctant to accept warnings that go counter to his own policies, or too dulled by cumulative exposure to read his intelligence perceptively, or too preoccupied with the immediate to

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respond to the longer-range. More often than not, an extraordinary number of administering, reviewing, coordinating, editing, and sometimes operating echelons insulate him from the intelligence desk officer.

4. To the extent that there is an answer to these difficulties, it lies not in creating additional publications or repeating warnings by rote in existing ones, but in sharpening intelligence warning and aiming it more directly at responsible officials. For instance, consideration might be given to holding regular National Security Council meetings limited to examination of crises which can be expected in the months ahead. Such a meeting would give the intelligence community the opportunity to ensure that the highest levels of the government have been warned, in specific and direct terms, of problems which it foresees.

5. Our widening of the distribution of the President's Intelligence Checklist is one effort to tighten the crucial relationship between policy-maker and intelligence analyst. Another, perhaps less direct, is the increased attention we are giving in National Intelligence Estimates to warning of developments which are realistic possibilities, even if less probable than others. We continue to highlight the main lines of probability, but attempt to convey greater awareness of variations and contingencies.

6. Beyond these measures, I would propose within CIA to:

a. Conduct more systematic periodic reviews of the raw intelligence received on each target country to make sure we know what is going on there.

b. Conduct similar reviews of our finished reporting on quiescent but inflammable situations with a view to providing

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more sharply focussed warning to responsible senior officials, perhaps by personal memorandum.

c. Circulate with occasional issues of the Central Intelligence Bulletin selected longer-range articles from the Current Intelligence Weekly Review which deal with potentially dangerous situations not susceptible to normal daily reporting.

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JOHN A. McCONE
Director

Concur:



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Deputy Director (Intelligence)

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